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AUTHOR Allen, Rodney F.
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ABSTRACT

Even with appropriate curriculum materials, teachers need to employ reflective springboards that cause learners to link Holocaust information and personal stories to the students' in-school and out-of-school realities and to issues in community life. The guide provides five activities that are intended to be used in any sequence and for any class. The guide's lessons are independent activities that introduce a serious study of the Holocaust. Each lesson is designed to elicit the students' personal knowledge. The guide offers detailed information as to how to introduce and implement each activity in the secondary classroom. Contains 15 references. (BT)

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Springboards into Holocaust Study: Five Activities for Secondary Social Studies Students

Rodney F. Allen
Florida State University
Tallahassee

Rodney F. Allen is Professor of Social Science Education where he works with beginning and experienced teachers on problems of teaching and learning. The activities in this article have been used with teachers and students in Florida, and modified for use with teachers in the Republic of Indonesia where the "outsiders," even after four hundred years, are "ethnic Chinese" in contrast to "indigenous Indonesians." Dr. Allen may be contacted at **rallen@mailer.fsu.edu**.

Address for Editors:

Rodney F. Allen
1105 Lasswade Drive
Waverly Hills
Tallahassee, FL 32312-2843
(850) 385-6559
(850) 644-7736 FAX/Office
rallen@mailer.fsu.edu
amythas@mlg.mega.net.id

Springboards into Holocaust Study: Five Activities for Secondary Social Studies Students

The popularity of Holocaust study is no guarantee that students will not loose its meaning in a blizzard of information (Florida, 1990). Fortunately, some state mandates for Holocaust study go beyond mastery of "facts" in order to promote tolerance by student discovery of personal meanings in those "facts" (Florida 1993, Furman 1983). Some states published instructional materials centered on personal stories. The most vital cultural concerns may be taught best through storytelling, the exchange of meanings within groups and across generations (Egan 1986). South Carolina, for example, has a superb curriculum resource using personal stories from participants in the Holocaust—stories that engage learners' imagination in the process of learning (Scher 1992). Yet, even with such appropriate materials, teachers need to employ reflective springboards that cause learners to link Holocaust information and those deeply personal stories to the students' in-school and out-of-school realities and to issues in community life (Newmann and Wehlage 1993).

The five activities outlined below are not a single set of lessons, that is, they are not intended to be used in any sequence nor are they intended to taught together to the same class. The lessons are independent activities that have served us well in introducing serious Holocaust study focused upon the development of tolerance. Each is designed to elicit students' personal knowledge – the more subjective and idiosyncratic knowledge that they derive from their own life experiences and from what they witness in the social environment around them. These springboards are reflective bridges between the past –the Holocaust and its stories – and the students' world.

ACTIVITY 1: A Handful of Peanuts.

At the introduction to Holocaust study, groups of three or four students are given a handful of peanuts in their shells. Each group is asked to pick out the "deviants" in the group of peanuts and mark each deviant peanut with an appropriate symbol. Once they have finished the assigned task, each team is to decide upon, write down, and then share its definition of "deviant" with the entire class. They will illustrate their definition with reference to their decisions on peanut deviants, including their choice of symbols for the peanut of deviants. This is an appropriate time for the teacher to share a personal story or two about the selection and treatment of deviants in social situations. Students, being careful to mask the identities of others, might share tales from personal experience about the selection and treatment of deviants. What are the many criteria used in these situations to identify deviants from the pattern or norm? Why the concern for uniformity or conformity? What is lost in this quest—the personal and social costs? Do any of these criteria make sense to the students –are the criteria for defining some persons as deviants justifiable?

Most important, are the students identifying persons as deviants or persons' behaviors as deviant? The teacher should have students recognize that their peanuts' characteristics were fixed or beyond their control. In considering deviants among people, should we separate the identification of "deviant" behavior from personal characteristics and beliefs as the basis for addressing "deviance"?

The teacher moves the discussion of a greater abstraction by asking students how deviance may be defined and identified–

a) anomalies: An observer examines a group and identifies a pattern in the group (of people, peanuts, etc.) Those items in the group that do not fit the pattern are misfits, or "deviants." They deviate from the identified pattern; and

b) norms: An observer begins with a belief system about what is right and proper and uses that belief to sort persons into fits and misfits.

Given these ideas, students reflect upon their definitions and identification strategies to detect peanut deviants. The teacher should question whether "difference" is "deviance." Does it matter whether we say a person is difference in this way or that, or if we say that a person is a deviant?

Then, the students may turn the Holocaust, 1933-1945, in Europe with the central question – Who did the Nazis target as deviants? Why did they target them? Did the Nazis confuse difference with deviance? If so, why might they have done this? How did the Nazis recognize the Jew in their midst? The Communist? The Jehovah's Witnesses? The homosexuals? These questions guide students in retrieving data as they read the appropriate section of their textbook. In my work, I also use the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's twelve-minute video, **Daniel's Story** (USHMM 1992), to personalize the meaning of difference as deviance in the Third Reicht and how "deviants" became targets. Using the perspective of a Jewish child growing up in Nazi Germany, the video describes the plight of a family victimized by the Nazis without graphic images of horror. Additional readings are used in hardcopy or on pre-selected web-sites for students to identify and explain "targets" in the Nazi belief and political system--from Roma and Sinti peoples (Gypsies) to Spanish Republicans, from Polish Catholics to political dissidents, from Free Masons to anti-socials, from Communists to Jehovah Witnesses (Watchtower 1991) and homosexuals (USHMM 1991), from persons with disabilities to Jews (Furman 1983, Stadtler 1973). It was easy to appear different and, therefore, be at risk in Nazi-dominated lands.

ACTIVITY 2: Neighborhood Sketch Map

Children were victims. Between 1933 and 1945, Nazis and their collaborators murdered over one and a half million children. The majority of them were Jewish. Others came from all victimized groups—Polish Catholics, Roma (Gypsy) children, and disabled children, to name a few. They died from disease and exhaustion in labor camps, from asphyxiation in gas chambers, from starvation, and from bullets. Children suffered during the Holocaust, as did adults. Often they suffered from the loss of their parents.

Each student is given a large sheet of scratch paper and is asked to draw a sketch map of his or her neighborhood. The map should contain the roadways of their enclave –an apartment building, condo, suburban development, or rural road. As students are completing this sketch map, they are asked to use darkened squares for houses and symbols for other community facilities such as synagogues, parks, shops, and schools. Students compare maps as they work, discussing the features of their neighborhoods. When finished, the students are asked to write in the names of the families living in the houses, condos or apartment wings. Who do they know by name? Who are the unknowns? At this nexus, the students together examine what they conclude about the community from their maps.

The students are reminded that during the Holocaust, parents were often removed from their homes never to see their children again. These events quite often took place suddenly. The students are asked to imagine that they are young parents in their community and that they are to be deported within the next 20 minutes. With whom would they leave their two children, to raise these children, because they are not likely see these children again?

Students quietly examine their maps and reflect upon the meaning of community and the strength of the web of social reciprocity. How important are neighbors? How important is it to know neighbors and not just "someone who lives next door" or "down the road?"

1) What are the forces in our lives that strengthen and weaken our commitment to community?

2) What actions may we undertake to strengthen our sense of community within the school district, if not the nation?

ACTIVITY 3: Giving up One's Own Peanut

At times during the 1930s, Jews found it possible to emigrate from Nazi Germany. Often they were forced out by threats, even sample imprisonment, and ordered to emigrate without their possessions and resources. As it became more difficult to find places for adults to go, it was still possible to get Jewish children out by ships and trains. Hundreds of parents surrendered their children to generous strangers in foreign lands to raise their children in safety.

After Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass, November 9-10, 1938) as mobs destroyed Jewish businesses and institutions, Jews were murdered and maimed, and the Nazis sent 30,000 Jews to concentration camps, a movement to save Jewish children was begun. During 1938 and 1939, almost 10,000 unaccompanied children, aged four to sixteen, rode trains out of Germany to freedom in Britain and North and South America. Once Hitler invaded Poland, the trains stopped and most parents never saw their children again (Samuels 1995).

With all writing instruments removed from their desks, each student is given a potato, a peanut, or a walnut in the shell. They are asked to examine their new object. The expectation is that they will learn everything about their new objects, their shapes,

anomalies, and idiosyncrasies. Then, tell the students about Kristalnacht and its horrors. The Jews who had not departed Germany mostly realized that it was more difficult now for them to get out and find a new life abroad. They cast about for options. I use several, brief oral history passages on parental dilemmas. The students then brainstorm and list options that seem open to Jews in late 1938 and before the invasion of Poland in 1939. The teacher should now tell the students about Kindertransport and the escape of children by sea from German port cities. Discuss the risks and the likely consequences of trying to send one's children abroad.

Then, the teacher with a box or bag goes about the classroom offering to take the "child" (peanut, walnut, or potato) abroad to a new home. Permit students who elect to surrender their children and those who decline to express their reasons and feelings about the options open to them at this moment in time. Ask them that, if they think as parents that they will survive the Holocaust and war, how they will know their peanut, walnut, or potato after the war. Will your "peanut" recognize you?

The central question here is "What is the price of survival?" Students might imagine the terror of it all: uprooted children, the unknown fate of parents, new languages and customs, each combined with the general uncertainty of the future. For some children there is the rage of abandonment, a rage which often endured. For others there is the rootlessness of being without a sense of place –a geographic as well as a social locus – in one's life.

Teachers and students might perform readers' theater using Diane Samuels' play, **Kindertransport** (1995). It works well to explore childhood issues. An alternative is to invite survivors or the children of survivors to sit in during this springboard and to respond to the students' reactions with stories from their own experience.

ACTIVITY 4: Controlling One's Identity and Name

Who is in? Who is Out? In India, which persons are scheduled (in the caste system) and who is unscheduled and, therefore, is an outcaste? In the film, "Bless the Beasts and the Children " (Swarthout 1970), the Federal Bureau of Land Management is pictured as rounding up bison on the open range and deciding which are desirable and which are not. Those deemed undesirable are penned up. Sports-persons who win an annual raffle and are permitted to shoot one bison each...in the pen. Local governments have "animal control" agencies that regularly declare some animals "feral," and have them killed. They declare other animals "surplus" or "unadoptable" and "put them to sleep."

In a world where persons are increasingly conscious of difference, who should have the power to define which persons may be in-caste and who is cast out? Which bison are undesirable, and die? Which animals are surplus? Students might tell stories here from their personal knowledge directed to answering the question --Who are our outcasts?

Individual and groups in all societies must deal with persons who are different, in some ways, from themselves. Some social identities such as gender, ethnicity, age, kinship, nationality, and color, are <u>outside</u> the range of personal choice –people are simply born into them. Other features of personal identity are more open to <u>choice</u> –religion, vocation, political affiliation, education, residence, personality attributes, marriage, and friendship affiliations. Each person constructs a self-identity that affects how the person chooses to be and to live in society. But each person has a social identity that is, at the very least, shaped by forces outside personal control. How important these uncontrollable forces are depends upon the ideology of the dominant power group in society or in any social context in which persons interact. How persons are

defined becomes especially acute as groups compete for jobs, recognition, and prestige during severe economic and political crises when differences in interests become intertwined with emotional elements of group identity—stereotypical ascriptions, fears of other groups' motives and designs, and deeply-rooted hostilities. Students should turn their story-sharing to stories of personal identity. Who defines them? How do they define themselves? How are their identities shaped by social interaction?

Hitler's rise to power came time of great economic turmoil after years of national humiliation following the First World War. Differences in interests spawned conflicts and group identities permitted the casting about for scapegoats. Nazi leadership developed an ideology that clearly proclaimed a national purpose and a set of social ideals that separated in-groups from out-groups. The outsiders were identified and declared to be a threat to the nation. Those persons defined as outsiders were depersonalized and became the subjects of discrimination and violence. Increasingly the in-group victimized the outsiders.

Daniel's Story (USHMM 1992) is the most effective vehicle that I have found to raise the identity questions in the context of Nazi Germany. I begin with a quotation from the early portion of the video:

> "I grew up in a country called Germany. It was a beautiful country, and we were proud to be Germans. My father fought in the First World War and won a medal for being a hero. I wanted to be a hero, too."

Jews in Germany defined themselves as Germans. They had the loyalties, the medals, and the papers to prove it. Under Hitler, however, Jews (and others as well) soon learned that they were defined to be cast out. As Daniel reports,

"Have you ever been punished for something you didn't do? Well, that's how we felt when the Nazis made us leave the swimming pool. It was 1937 and I was 10 years old. The Nazis kept making new rules, and life became harder and sadder for Jewish people. It was always, "Jews can't do this, can't go there." They tried to make us feel like we weren't as good as other Germans—like we weren't Germans at all."

Students should discuss the shifting view of powerful others toward these Germans, the Jews. See how Daniel is aware of how others are redefining who he is –his identity as a person within Germany--long before the required wearing of Yellow Stars. In the remainder of the video, students can identify various strategies used by the Nazis and collaborators to degrade Daniel's and other Jews' self and social identities.

Students might reflect now upon their own experience. Words and body language can be used to hurt, embarrass, belittle, tease, or make someone feel bad. These are often called "put-downs." What are the motives of persons doing "put-downs"? What differences in others do the perpetrators at school focus upon in their words and behaviors? What effects do they intent on the self and social identities of their targets? How do put-downs in the students' experiences function like those experienced in **Daniel's Story**? When a person or a group in school become targets of others' "put-downs," are there collaborators in school, as well as perpetrators? Are there bystanders? How might students work to diminish, if not end, the hurtful intolerance of "put-downs"? Is there a fundamental fallacy in the following rhyme?

Sticks and stones may hurt my bones –
But words will never hurt me."

ACTIVITY 5: An Allegory

Teachers engaged in Holocaust study seem always to like Pastor Martin Niemoller's famous quotation, turning it into poetry, posters, and wall murals (Niemoller 1968):

> First they came for the communists, and I did not
> Speak out—because I was not a communist.
> Then they came for the trade-unionists, and I did not
> Speak out—because I was not a trade-unionist.
> Then they came for the Jews, and I did not
> Speak out—because I was not a Jew.
> Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not
> Speak out—because I was a Protestant.
> Then they came for me—and there was no one left to
> Speak for me.

Niemoller (1892-1984) was a World War I German submarine commander and hero, who became a Protestant minister and was an early Nazi supporter. After Hitler came to power in 1933, Niemoller preached against the Nazis, was arrested in 1937 and imprisoned by the Nazis from 1938 to 1945 when he was liberated by Allied troops at the war's conclusion. He saw the consequences of Nazis policies and beliefs from the pulpit, and then from the diversity of victims in prison with him.

Many teachers use Maurice Ogden's poem "The Hangman," an allegory about a town in which the residents are hanged one by one by a mysterious hangman who is judge and jury. He begins, of courses, with the weakest, most vulnerable persons, ending with but one citizen:

> "And where are the others who might have stood
> Side by side in the common good?"

"Dead," I whispered: and amiably
"Murdered," the Hangman corrected me:
"First the alien, then the Jew…
I did no more than you let me do." (Ogden 1985)

With each hanging, town folk stood around rationalizing why the victim was hanged and why they should not get involved (Ogden 1959).

I prefer to use a dramatic classroom reading of Eve Bunting's **Terrible Things** (1980). A community of animals in the corner of a forest let Terrible Things come and, without giving reasons, remove one species after another. The remaining animals rationalize after each removal. Finally, only a single white bunny remains. He departs seeking a new community wondering if they will be more knowledgeable and more committed to the common good. Students compare the bunny's experience with Pastor Niemoller's. Why is looking the other way such an attractive option in these situations? What turns us into bystanders…almost collaborators? After all, Ogden rhymed, "I did no more than you let me do."

Students are alerted that during their historical study of the Holocaust they will be searching for bystanders, persons who looked the other way, and the consequences of this behavior.

For now, the students are asked to explain why Bunting's work is an allegory. In an allegory symbolic fictional figures and actions are used to reveal some fundamental truth or generalization about human existence, from the point of view of the teller. The allegory may be expressed in writing, in drama, or in some other form of artistic expression. Parables and fables are two forms well known to our students. They readily look for and find meaning in **The Hangman** and **Terrible Things**—the ultimate agony of the

bystanders who break with any commitment to others in their communities.

The students share stories about bystanders and collaborators from their personal playground and community experiences (masking names of others). Much later, they are given the opportunity to write and perform an allegory on some portion of the Holocaust at the conclusion of this academic study.

Conclusion: These springboards are powerful experiences for Holocaust study focused upon tolerance. Teaching the Holocaust in a traditional, quantitative, date and place name manner in which students master vocabulary and dates is to offer plenty of trees and to miss the forest. These springboards have proven to offer students the forest –confronting the event itself in ways which we, students and teachers, share our in-depth stories too, makes for greater understanding than a litany of statistics.

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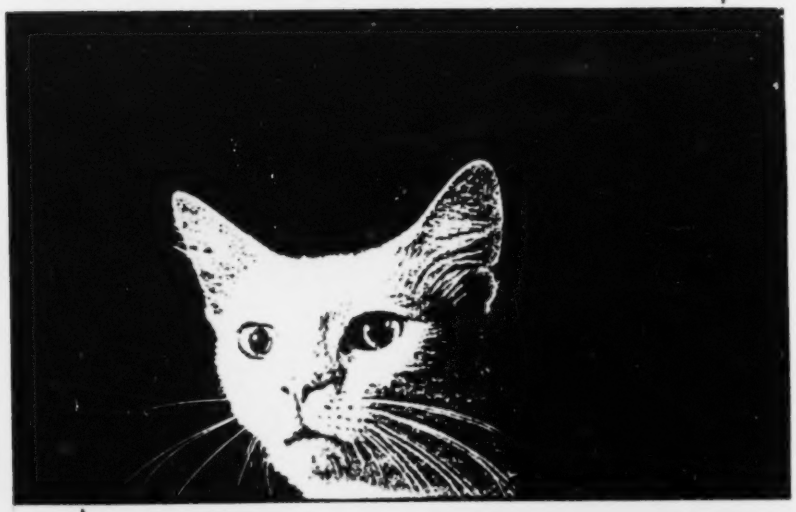
Boxed Inset

"The history of the Holocaust (1933-1945) the systematic, planned annihilation of European Jews and other groups by Nazi Germany, a watershed event in the history of humanity, to be taught in a manner that leads to an investigation of human behavior, an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and an examination of what it means to be a responsible and respectful person, for purposes of encouraging tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and for nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions."

Florida Statutes Chapter 233.061(1)(f)



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